

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Sport, Education and Society on 19/11/15, available online:

| <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13573322.2015.1112779>

**Teachers Stories: Physical education teachers constructions and experiences of masculinity within secondary school PE**

**Sport, Education and Society**

**For Correspondence:** Adam White, [Adam.White@Winchester.ac.uk](mailto:Adam.White@Winchester.ac.uk)

**Adam White**

Faculty of Business, Law and Sport, University of Winchester  
Sparkford Road, Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 4NR

[Adam.White@Winchester.ac.uk](mailto:Adam.White@Winchester.ac.uk)

**Michael Hobson**

School of Education, Theology and Leadership, St Mary's University, Twickenham  
Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London, TW1 4SX

[Michael.Hobson@StMarys.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.Hobson@StMarys.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

PE and sport have traditionally been identified by scholars as a key mechanism for the production and reproduction of a culturally esteemed ideal of masculinity, premised upon being stoic, strong, competitive, sexist and homophobic. Yet, more recent research reflects a change in valued masculinity as a response to declining cultural homophobia. As such, this preliminary study looks to establish how PE teachers understand and construct masculinities within the educational environment. Through in-depth interviews, we find participants recognised many elements of softer masculinities, described in inclusive masculinities literature, as being performed by contemporary teenagers. This includes being emotionally open, embracing a more effeminate taste in dress and being increasingly physically tactile. However, we also found that the PE teachers have a cohort variance in their masculine values, with those socialized in sport through the 1980s showing the most orthodox and oppressive views.

**Key words:** Education, Gender, Inclusive Masculinities, Physical Education, Sexuality, Sport, Teachers

## Introduction

Research in the field of sport and PE has suggested that one of the key functions of organised team sports is the production of a conservative form of masculinity among boys and men (Crosset, 1990; Pronger, 1990). This is both a cultural and structural artifact. Structurally, PE's often gender-segregated curriculum, primarily delivered through team sports, is based upon the principles of domination (Anderson, 2012). Culturally, misogyny and homophobia were embedded into these sports as part of their creation in Britain and other western cultures (Clarke, 1998). Here, the primary method that boys compete for better social positioning is through the deployment of hyper masculine discourses (Clark, 2013).

Some argue historically the dominant archetype of orthodox masculinity has been (re)produced among males in western sports contexts; resulting in a system of continual struggle in an attempt to reach the privileged sphere of the gender order (Connell, 1995). Anderson (2009) describes this as somewhat similar to a king-of-the-hill contest, whereby boys continually battle to be king, with the king continually pushing down and fending off the boys who contest their positions.

However, the social milieu in Britain has witnessed momentous change towards gender and sexuality (Clements and Field, 2014). This has influenced a shift in male stratification within sport, education and youth culture (Anderson, 2014; Cleland, 2014; McCormack, 2012; Magrath, Anderson & Roberts, 2014; Roberts, 2013; 2014). British social attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted, to a more liberal view of gay people (Park & Rheard, 2013). Sports scholars have also evidenced a shift within the sporting terrain, with acceptance of both sexual diversity and acceptance of broader gender performances (Anderson, 2014; Bullingham et al., 2014; Jarvis, 2013; Magrath et al., 2014; Pringle & Markula, 2005).

Through the notion of homophobia, Anderson (2014) and others (Adams, 2011; Cleland, 2014; Murray & White, Forthcoming) have evidenced that as cultural disdain of homosexuality reduces, a wider range of boys' behaviours are socially endorsed. Accordingly, boys today are able to engage in behaviours previously ascribed as feminine, without damaging their masculine identity or popularity status (McCormack, 2012). Inclusive masculinities scholarship demonstrates a cohort effect, with previous generations evidencing more orthodox views towards masculinities and diverse sexualities than contemporary youth (Anderson & McGuire, 2010;

McCormack, Anderson & Adams, 2014). These men, born between 1950 and 1980, are those who currently teach and lead PE school sport. Thus, it is important to understand the similarity or disparity in masculinities among these cohorts within the sporting locale. This research thus attends to male PE teachers' constructions of masculinities in an epoch of inclusivity.

This paper outlines research within the terrain of sport and education before discussing the utility of inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2014) for understanding the contemporary dynamics of masculinity in PE. Through in-depth interviews with 17 English secondary school male PE teachers, who teach primarily boys PE, our study looks to explore their understanding of the changing terrain of gender in PE. We found that these teachers have a cohort difference in their constructions of masculinity. When split into generational groups of; The Baby Boomers (those socialized into sport in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s), Generation X (those socialized in sport in the 1980s) and iGeneration (experiencing their sport socialization in the 1990s and 2000s), each offered a different construction of masculinity, with those socialized in sport in a homohysterical era offering the most orthodox attitudes. Simultaneously they recognised that today's secondary school students are presenting a broader range of gendered behaviours than previously.

### **PE and the (re)production of masculinity**

The roots of modern sport are often attributed to the private or independent school system, and the military, at the time of the industrial revolution. Sport's ability to teach socially valued and masculine characteristics gave it prominent use in a western society concerned with the feminization of men (Cancian, 1987). Playing fields were the locale that boys learned a rigid form of orthodox masculinity, which is 'characterised by anti-femininity, homophobia, emotional restrictiveness, competitiveness, toughness and aggressiveness' (Espelage, 2013, p.37). It is, therefore, not surprising that Clarke (2013) asserts that, 'schools in general, and PE departments in particular, are sites for social and moral regulation wherein gender and gender roles are produced against a dominant heterosexuality and a marginalised, often vilified, homosexuality' (p. 90). Those who are successful, through athletic achievement or association with heterosexuality, benefit considerably within this space, yet this environment is troubling and hostile for many boys, who don't or can't

perform the orthodox masculinity that is privileged. This includes those who are; non-athletic, more studious, effeminate in taste, and of course, gay people. Orthodox masculinity is thus 'experienced by many as a straitjacket; a set of conventions of behaviour, style, ritual and practice that limit and confine, and are subject to surveillance, informal policing and regulation' (Whannel, 2007, p.11) which are continually played out in the context of PE. The often-dominant masculine principles, that underpin PE, can create an environment that generates a sense of social exclusion for many boys (Clarke, 2013).

Much of the hyper-masculine environment of PE is not a result of its physically active nature, but more a *product* of its structures and delivery (Humberson, 1990). In England, PE is a compulsory subject for secondary school students, yet those who deliver it largely determine its structure and content. PE teachers usually have positive experiences in school sport (Kirk, 2011). Accordingly, rather than breaking away from their hyper-masculine athletic master identity, they embark in a career in a field which they highly value; PE teaching.

As such, PE, like sport, can be seen as a closed-loop system (Anderson, 2005). Those who are part of the sporting system have invested in it, value it and are subsequently unconscious of its weaknesses and limitations. Often as a result of their positive experiences of PE, teachers can uncritically embody dominant gender norms/discourses (Wrench & Garret, 2012). Similarly, Brown (2005) has explained PE teachers' reproduction of their gendered school PE experiences (the closed-loop process) by utilising Bourdieu's (1993) concepts of field, capital and habitus. Teachers are thus essential to the construction (possibly even the reconstruction and challenge to) of orthodox masculinities in the PE and sporting locale (Humberson, 1990).

### **Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

Inclusive Masculinity suggests homophobia is key to gender policing, and utilizes the concept of homophobia (McCormack & Anderson, 2014), or the fear of being socially perceived as homosexual. Anderson (2014) posits three conditions for homophobia; 1) cultural antipathy of homosexuality, 2) cultural belief that homosexuality can occur within one's social networks; and 3) conflation of femininity with homosexuality. By recognising the dynamic intersection of each, it is possible to

understand variance across time, culture and institutions. It is also useful for analyzing variance among different cohorts of men within the same social institution. By utilising Anderson's theory, it is possible to examine for generational variance. This is crucial because we use a cohort design in our analysis, as men emerge with varying degrees of awareness of and attitudes toward homosexuality.

### *Cultural Homoerasure*

In an environment where antipathy for homosexuality is high, but homosexuality is considered a statistical aberration or non-existent, men are permitted to behave in effeminate ways without threat to their heterosexual identity (McCormack & Anderson, 2014). For example, Ibson (2002) shows that homosocial tactility decreased among men at the same time as society began to understand homosexuality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He found distance between male bodies increased as men grew aware of the existence of homosexuality.

### *Cultural Homohysteria*

When each of Anderson's tenets of homohysteria are present, men struggle to attain the hegemonic position (Connell, 1995), which David and Brannon (1976) exemplify as: 'be a sturdy oak', 'be a big wheel', 'give 'em hell' and 'no sissy stuff'. Those who do not achieve this gold standard of masculinity—which most cannot—are thus relegated in the gender order (Connell, 1995).

Anderson asserts 'in a homohysterical culture, heterosexual men are culturally incapable of permanently proving their heterosexuality' (2009, p. 95). However as a result of the perception that all homosexuals are gender atypical, men can perform in a way that is *other than* homosexual, primarily by aligning to orthodox masculinity, and thus being overtly homophobic (Connell, 1995). This is not necessarily a personal attitudinal position against homosexuality, rather it is the matter that homosexuality is stigmatised and thus 'sissy, untough, uncool' (Leverenz, 1986, p. 455). Kimmel (1994) says, 'homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay...' (p.147).

Britain in the 1980s is an example of a homohysterical culture (Mac an Ghail, 1994). The AIDS outbreak, coupled with religious fundamentalism, influenced a particular form of conservative politics. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher introduced

Section 28, which silenced homosexuality within schools (Adams, Cox & Dunstan, 2004). It is in this environment that many PE teachers have worked or have been educated.

### *Culture of Inclusivity*

Since the early 1990s the social environment for same-sex attracted youth has improved. Section 28 was repealed in 2003 and the legislative gains for the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) community have continued, including gay marriage in 2013. British Social Attitudes Survey quantitative data shows between 1987 and 2006 the percentage of British people who thought homosexuality was 'always wrong' dropped by 39.9%, from 63.6% in 1987 to just 23.7% in 2006 (Park & Rheard, 2013). Although this is evidence of progress, there is some scepticism as to the validity of these results, due to the phrasing of the respondent's options. Yet, these findings can be compared longitudinally and against our American relatives (Loftus, 2001), which makes them useful evidence for expressing a change in social climates for LGB populations in Anglo-American contexts.

Today we understand that homosexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation that members of our family, friendship networks or neighbours may be, yet, many men no longer care (Anderson, 2009). As a result of the shift in cultural attitudes, homosexuality is less stigmatized and thus no longer feared. In contemporary western culture, in general, young men are not worried to be associated with homosexuality or feminised taste, and are subsequently afforded an expanding variety of acceptable (even celebrated) gender performances. In other words, homophobia has lost its authority in the policing of masculinities; and as Anderson (2014), McCormack (2012) and colleagues have shown (Adams, 2011; Roberts, 2013) acceptable masculinities have subsequently transformed.

In a culture of inclusivity, there is no archetype of masculinity that is 'culturally exalted'; rather, multiple masculinities are equally esteemed in a significantly more horizontal alignment. Here, multiple ways of doing masculinity are equally valuable by young people (Anderson, 2014; McCormack, 2012; Roberts, 2014). It is important to clarify, this is not a gender utopia for which homophobia and other socio-negative gender behaviours are extinct and replaced by a truly egalitarian domain. Rather it is recognition that a significant proportion of western society now

values more than just one masculine performance, with traditional (orthodox) and progressive (inclusive) masculinities being more equally appreciated.

Although sport was traditionally considered as an environment that reproduced an orthodox masculinity, many of today's athletes are demonstrating a softer and expanded notion of masculine performances that are indicative of inclusive masculinity (Anderson & White, 2015). Through ethnographic research, inclusive masculinity scholars have documented feminised tastes (Adams, 2011), increased homosocial tactility (Anderson & McCormack, 2014), decreased misogyny (Anderson & McGuire, 2010), emotional support and bromances (Anderson, 2014; Zorn & Gregory, 2005) and the intellectualisation of pro-gay sentiments (Magrath et al., 2014). Yet these findings are reflective of athletes under 25 years of age, with notable exceptions (Cleland, 2014) reflecting the attitudes of an older demographic. However in research on bisexual men's coming out narratives, McCormack, Anderson and Adams (2014) found a generational difference in the constructions of masculinity among men, as a result of experiences within homohysterical zeitgeists, such as the 1980s.

Yet, research findings are not unanimous, with some scholars documenting that sports locales, such as playgrounds and locker rooms, are still prime sites for the policing of masculinity among boys (Atkinson & Kehler, 2010; Martino & Beckett, 2004). Therefore, this research looks to examine how contemporary PE teachers construct and understand masculinity within the education terrain.

## **Methods**

This research examines 17 English male PE teachers' constructions of masculinity within the context of boys' secondary school PE in England. All of the participants in this research were current and active teachers of PE in the South of England at the time of study (February to November 2014). The participants work at six different secondary schools across the South of England, with two being of religious affiliation (Catholic) with one of those also being in the independent school sector. The participants ranged in age from 22 years to 57 years of age, and are all male. All of the participants described their sexual orientation as heterosexual and their ethnicity as White British. The teachers varied in their length of service, with two being newly qualified teachers, and another two having in excess of 20 years teaching experience.



The teachers primarily taught PE to boys only. As a convenience sample, all of the participants were friends or previous colleagues of the first author. It is thus not the intention of this research to be generalizable, but rather to initiate further discussion on gender within the PE locale, in response to current reflections of inclusive masculinities among the contemporary youth culture (Anderson, 2009).

*Insert Table 1 here.*

This study utilised in-depth qualitative interviews as means of data collection. This allowed us to investigate the multiple meanings and experiences these PE teachers had to offer regarding masculinities in PE across both time and context. A semi-structured interview schedule was created prior to the interviews, which contained the themes; masculinities, sexuality and temporal change. A range of areas were discussed including the ways that boys present masculinity, homosexuality or homophobia and how things have changed across time. This schedule was loosely followed with the focus being upon the narratives and experiences of the teachers.

All interviews were conducted by the first author and with the mean average being 37 minutes in length. All interviews took place in the school setting, in confidential spaces identified by the participants. Interviews were digitally recorded before being transcribed. Interviews were coded independently by each author using a constant-comparative method of emerging themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). The code were discussed and agreed between both authors to increase Inter-rater reliability of the coded themes (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Recognition of Inclusive Masculinities and Inclusion of Sexual Minorities were the two main themes that emerged. However upon segmenting the sample into sport socialisation cohorts, aligned to homophobia (McCormack & Anderson, 2014) distinct differences emerged regarding the themes of lacking awareness of homosexuality (Baby Boomers), orthodox masculinity valued (Generation X) and inclusive attitudes (iGeneration).

Ethical approval was obtained from the authors' institution. All procedures followed the ethical guidelines detailed by the British Sociological Association. Participants had the right to withdraw, to not answer any question and to review the transcription before used, but none did. Additionally, as this research involved the

discussion of persons under the age of 18, participants were reminded that any disclosures which implied a safety risk to any child would be reported to appropriate agencies (such as the police or children's social care), however this was not necessary. All names were changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants, those they named and their institutions.

### **Findings**

Using the experiences of 17 PE teachers, we were able to evidence how these PE teachers construct and understand masculinities in the secondary school environment. Three themes were common among the narratives of these teachers, which concur to current inclusive masculinities scholarship (McCormack, 2012). Firstly, we established a cohort difference in the narratives of 16 of our 17 PE teachers, which relates to their sporting socialisation and homophobia. Secondly, the PE teachers observed their male students emoting, being physically tactile and valuing clothing styles that were once considered effeminate. Finally, we found that these teachers recognised that gay students were accepted among their peers, and were not victimized, as previous research indicated (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

#### **Cohort differential of PE teachers' masculinities**

Among 16 of our 17 PE teachers, it was evident that a cohort difference was apparent in their constructions and attitudes towards masculinity. Similar to other inclusive masculinities research, we noticed that there was a difference between the ways our participants framed masculinities, dependent on the era for which they were socialised into sport. Utilising Anderson's (2014) terminology, we have set three distinct cohorts of men:

- 1) Baby boomers: men who were socialised into sport before the 1980s.
- 2) Generation X: men who were socialised in sport throughout the 1980s.
- 3) iGeneration: men who were socialised in sport since the 1990s.

We have explicitly modified Anderson's (2014) definitions from the birth to when they have been socialised within sport. This is to reflect that sport is a key environment where boys develop their masculinity (Pronger, 1990).

#### *The Baby Boomers*

The baby boomers were characterised by either a lack of awareness to sexual diversity or by seeing sexual diversity as a non-issue. Jason, for example, believed there were no homosexual students at his school, expressing, 'I wouldn't know. We don't have any gay students'. At the same school, when Peter was asked about the gay friendliness of the school, he replied, 'I haven't seen anything gay in this school'. Throughout both interviews they offered support for homosexual students but were unaware that there could be any within their school. These two teachers are from the same school as Roger, who openly discussed two boys who were openly as gay, and both have been taught by Jason and Peter recently.

Similarly other teachers proposed that sexuality was a non-issue in the sense that it was irrelevant. Many believed that a student's sexuality was unimportant, none of their business, and didn't affect their schooling. Mark suggested:

Gay students are the same as a heterosexual student. What they do is up to them... and it would only impact me as a teacher when it becomes a problem... Like if someone started to bully them or they needed to talk about a personal worry.

Shaun simply said, 'A student's sexuality is not important to PE', it was therefore evident throughout their narratives that these men were either oblivious to sexual diversity or believe it was a non-issue in regards to them. Although it may be suggested that the Baby Boomers are more mature, offering more liberal and accepting narratives; when compared to those within different generational groups we suggest that this is a distinct attitudinal positioning of sexual diversity being a non-issue.

### *Generation X*

The five participants who we describe as Generation X often portrayed gay people in negative ways. When discussing a student coming out at his school, Daniel commented upon the changing rooms; 'It was a bit weird how they other students still shared changing rooms with the gay student'. Max similarly commented, 'I must admit, I really don't understand being gay. I just don't see how they can like other men'. These narratives may be a recognition of ignorance or a curiosity regarding these PE teachers' lack of understanding around homosexuality. Yet, the way homosexuality was framed by both these teachers is explicitly negative; using

adjectives such as ‘weird’ being one example. Such negative portrayals of homosexual students can be seen by Roger; he said, ‘Even sometimes the other students, who are basically being *perved* on, they’re not bothered’. We followed this up by asking how Roger manages this behaviour, which he responded:

Well, it is quite amusing to be perfectly honest. I try and tell them off. But there is no point telling them off for it. They’re not going to change, and they are nice lads. But I do try and say to them, you know, how do you think they feel about it...But they are like (in a camp tone) “stop it sir”.

Steve, who worked at a catholic school, discussed how he didn’t think gay students should come to a religious affiliated environment. He reported, ‘I don’t understand why we get so many gay students at a catholic school. You’d think they would have the sense to realise this isn’t the place for them’. He then concluded, ‘Surely they cant expect to be treated the same here... Being gay is wrong in the eyes of the church’. Although Steve’s narrative intersects with the catholic affiliation of the school, which is certainly something for wider debate and exploration, it is the pattern or orthodox constructions of masculinity across all of the men in generation x that we are reporting. It is the negative articulation of homosexuality, ignorance and clear lack of empathy or supportiveness that has invoked us to perceive these men as aligning to orthodox tenets of masculinity.

### *iGeneration*

Teachers in the iGeneration cohort presented supportive and understanding discourses, especially in comparison to those of Generation X and the Baby Boomers. For example, Bailey discussed what he would do if a student come out as gay:

I guess initially I would thank them for having the courage I guess to confide in me as a teacher, or tutor... I guess stress that it is normal... I think the most important thing is that they are the decision maker and it’s up to them.

After this response was given, Bailey asked; ‘Is that what I am supposed to do? I think that’s what I would want to happen if I was gay’. Not only did we see that Bailey was sympathetic and supportive towards a student coming out to him, he was seeking approval in wanting to do the right thing.

Comparably, Jack also discussed how he might manage a student coming out. He said:

I suppose the key is the aftercare. That student has told you as they need some help or support and it's my job as a human being and a teacher to do that... I would keep an ear out, I would make an effort to see how they were and would check in with them.

Jack was clear that he would make a special effort to support and help any students who come out as gay. Whereas those in Generation X offered short responses such as; 'I don't know' (Daniel), or as Max suggested 'I'd speak with their parents'; the members of iGeneration has supportive and understanding strategies if a student were to disclose they were gay.

Later in Bailey's interview, he also criticized gendered language and how it may be hurtful to a student. He said:

You might think if you're a teacher and you make a comment to a boy, say in a PE lesson, who is potentially showing a bit of weakness in a sporting context. You might say... "man up", or "stop being such a girl". You might think of it as a throw away comment, which doesn't have any impact, but the kid might not feel the same... I don't think those comments are appropriate, those comments don't have a place [in PE].

Being a new PE teacher, Ashley remarked on his experiences of university knowing an openly gay man. He commented, 'Before uni, I didn't know anybody gay. Then we had this lad in halls'. He continued, 'After a few weeks of living with him, I become really aware of what it must be like being gay and some of the challenges... I would happily support a gay student now because of it'. It was only those PE teachers who are part of iGeneration that presented a supportive, empathetic and positive rhetoric towards homosexual students.

The difference in narrative between all three cohorts of PE teachers distinctly resonates with McCormack and Anderson's (2014) concept of homophobia. There was only one outlier, Harrison, who although formed part of the Baby Boomers, was distinctly conscious and aware of sexuality and how it may impact students (as shown below). Harrison's pastoral responsibilities, and focus on welfare as a deputy head teacher, may account for why his account is different to other teachers in our study.

Recognition has to be given to the negative undertones of the teachers' narratives. Regardless of the cohort the teachers are from, they all recognise that gay people may have additional needs or challenges not necessarily experienced by heterosexual peers. The teachers seem surprised about how young gay students' friendship groups are supportive towards them, possibly as they have seen lack of support elsewhere (although only Harrison could give a concrete experience of this). This may be a product of a cultural perception that sexually diverse communities are victims of cultural homophobia, regardless of actual experience, something recognised in previous research (McCormack et al., 2014).

### **Recognition of inclusive masculinities**

Recent developments in masculinities research have reflected a distinct change in the way young men in post-compulsory education perform masculinities (McCormack, 2012). The same findings are recognised by the 17 PE teachers as also being true of secondary school students, in the south of England. This is pertinent, because not only are academics observing a change in the multiple mechanisms by which men present a more egalitarian notion of masculinity, but PE teachers (whose observations are not subject to the Hawthorne effect - whereby people modify behaviour in response to an overt observer) are doing the same.

Throughout the interviews, 11 of 17 PE teachers discussed ways in which contemporary secondary school students are emotionally supportive of one another. Antony was discussing how one of his students didn't get selected for an academy football team at a recent trial, which was extremely disappointing for the student. He said;

Bruce didn't make the cut. He was devastated. Completely distraught... His mates were brilliant though; they would look after him, cheer him up and try to re-motivate him...

When we asked if students made any negative comments towards Bruce, Antony firmly responded, 'Not one. They wouldn't... They are his mates'. Jack discussed an athlete's romantic relationships, and how one student had recently broken up with his girlfriend. He said, 'When Harry's girlfriend dumped him it was a distraction for the rugby lads, they were more worried about him than school or sport'. Although these examples are about friends supporting each other emotionally, which may be

something expected in contemporary youth culture (Anderson, 2014), this contradicts previous research which reported that men were compelled to be stoic (Connell, 1995). Although we know men have always been supportive of one another, it is the increasingly emotional nature and care that is significant to contemporary masculinities.

The teachers across all the schools spoke of social inclusion and peer counselling as two key strategies of emotional support. Harry was socially included in activities, as Jack explained; 'Everywhere they went, Harry was there. They wouldn't let him out of their sight'. Peer counselling was also common among our respondents, involving listening and talking over problems. Daniel mentioned, 'They just sit and talk through problems', Rich concurred, saying, 'Listening and talking mainly, they allow them to vent and get it off their chest'. The experiences and narratives of eleven of our participants concur with recent research that recognises that young men are now increasingly more emotionally supportive of one another. These PE teachers show that secondary school students are caring of their friends, and utilise appropriate strategies to help with emotional problems (Anderson 2014; Zorn & Gregory, 2005).

The increase in physical tactility between men is also recognised among the PE teachers across all the schools in our study, with nine mentioning boys cuddling and touching in school. Ashley, a young trainee teacher, commented, 'Boys are touching all the time now. If you stop the lesson for a second they are leaning on each other or sitting on each others laps'. Similarly, Dave said, 'As soon as you mention the word "groups" in lesson now you get orgies with a group of boys literally all over one another'. However these behaviours are not limited to outdoor sporting spaces. Steve spoke about cuddling in mixed-sex GCSE theory lessons; 'Every theory lesson I spent more time telling the guys to stop touching than I do teaching'. While Ibson (2002) recognises an increase in the physical distance between men as homophobia increases (Anderson, 2009), these teachers have noticed a reduction in personal space with their pupils embracing same-sex touch in a social environment of inclusivity. Interestingly, the comment of Dave and Steve, who are from different schools, are somewhat negative towards these increasingly tactile behaviours, something we also attribute to the cohort differentiation in constructions of masculinity.

Softer masculinities also impact effeminate styles now available to young men, a significant aspect of different youth cultures in current times (Coad, 2009).



These PE teachers offered examples of how boys are image conscious, both in their clothing and their presentation. Bailey recognised the importance of branded clothing to athletes, he said; 'Brands are a real thing now for athletes. They have to be associated with a particular brand or an icon or a logo. They have to be seen to be wearing what the current elite level top performers are wearing'. Similarly, Daniel recognised the importance of styled boots and *skins* (a popular brand of thermal underclothing); 'The lads today are all about coloured boots and skins, every lesson we see a whole host of shiny new kit'. Students' focus upon their image is something some teachers were concerned about, primarily due to time constraints. Ashley mentioned, 'It's a challenge getting boys to change in five minutes. Some of them take longer than the girls with their hair and products'. Jack talked about a specific student in his sixth form who embraced an effeminate style:

I think being style conscious is what girls look for these days as well. It's a culture change. These days it's what the stereotypical culture is for guys. It is more ... skinny jeans, tight tops, spray tans and stuff like that. They wear skinny jeans, and tight t-shirts so they can show off their biceps rather than baggy jeans and a baggy t-shirt.

Although Jack is clearly expressing that effeminate style is done to attract females in a heterosexual coupling, it is still indicative of males' increasing range of presentation within socially sanctioned boundaries.

Roger was most vocal on the topic of image. He started by recognising that boys are increasingly "metrosexual". He continued:

Boys are a little bit more feminine I suppose in some ways... They spend probably longer doing their hair, wearing earrings, and worrying about how they look rather than before it was just kind of like lets just boot a football round and run around, you know... There is a lad in my PE group who, won't do PE unless he thinks he looks alright...

Roger is critical of this recent focus upon image and its impact to sport, sometimes finding he has to police the behaviours of his students. 'I had a boy not turn up for practice because he had to go get a haircut one day... I gave him a what-for (a telling off). He then discovered he loved rugby and got a contract at a premiership rugby club'.



The male PE teachers in our study recognise a softer way that young men present masculinity, by being emotionally aware and compared to their own experience of youth. Older understandings of masculinities have changed, and it is this newer somewhat broader masculine image and performance that these PE teachers are recognising in the style and behaviour of today's teenagers.

### **Students' inclusion of sexual minorities**

Our participants also discussed how homosexual students are included, or not, by their peers. Four of these teachers perceived that PE could be a space where homophobic bullying may proliferate. For instance, Harrison (deputy head at Boys High) discussed how the changing room might be an unsafe environment; he said, 'The changing rooms are homophobic. Obviously for the nature of taking clothes off, other boys could be accused of looking, taking an interest in... for some children this is a very intimidating place'. Also mentioning how the changing rooms may be a place where homophobic bullying could take place, Daniel said; 'I think the banter in the changing rooms may be homophobic'. Steve perceived the changing rooms may be a violent place for gay students, he commented; 'I think the changing rooms may be really dangerous for gay students, if they look at a guy then they may end up being taught a lesson'. The perceptions described above by Harrison, Daniel and Steve was also mentioned by Roger. Yet, none of the four participants were able to recall any instances where these things have actually happened. It is therefore plausible that these postulations reflect their understanding of locker-room culture from when they were young or a dominant discourse that bullying, especially that with homophobic undertones, is prolific in changing spaces

Conversely, youth are reporting that the reality for LGB youth is somewhat more positive. Like other research (Magrath et al., 2014), we found gay students are included and embraced by their peers in PE. For example, Roger talked about two openly gay students in his PE class:

There are lads here who are openly gay and I don't think they get bullied...

No one says anything negative to them... I suppose they are always in lessons with them so I guess it doesn't bother them really.

Antony mentioned an instance where one of his students came out as gay, and how it went under the radar:

This lad in year nine come out to everyone. But I didn't even realise that he had come out, and he made a joke in a gymnastics lesson about other students touching him, like erotically. The class found it hilarious... It was only later when another student said that he had come out, that I realised how funny the joke actually was.

Antony later said, 'It doesn't seem to have impacted the student's friendships at all. He seems happy. In fact, he has really developed since he has been open about his sexuality'. Similar stories are apparent from Shaun, Dave, Daniel, Nigel and Matt, who also had an openly gay student a few years ago at the school they teach at. Shaun expressed how his peers were fine with one of his students being gay; 'When James announced he was gay, no one cared. The banter started but that all seemed in good spirit. James seemed to lead it most the time'. Similarly, Nigel commented; 'When James come out it was a huge shock for us as teachers... but they, James' peers, didn't bat an eyelid... Nothing changed'.

Some of the PE teachers knew of gay students but had no real stories to discuss. Ashley mentioned, 'We have one gay student, I have never noticed or heard of anything negative. He seems like anyone else'. Warwick echoed these sentiments, 'I teach Tim who is gay. I can't say I have really noticed anything... Seems like any other good year ten student'. Recalling his previous school, where he was the tutor for a gay male in year eight and nine, Bailey mentioned, 'I was never made aware of anything. He was a regular student. He hated PE but other than that he was fine'.

The comments were not completely devoid of negative reports, with Harrison offering two historic occasions of homophobic bullying. Harrison's first story was when he first started as a year leader (twelve years before the interview). Harrison said:

There was a lad who came out; and at that particular point in school history this was very rare. This gay child was, not unkindly, was very camp. He didn't hide the fact he was gay. As his year director, I was very worried about keeping him free from bullying... One day there was a group of maybe six or seven boys from the football team. They came around and one of the boys started giving homophobic bullying. The gay student just turned around and said, "Aww darling what's wrong? Didn't, your mum give you enough cuddles when you were little? Come on I'll give you a cuddle" sort of thing.

This story lends support for the work of Mac an Ghaill (1994), showing the secondary school environment at that time as homophobic; yet also how homosexual students are not just victims of homophobia, but can sometimes be empowered through their confidence (Savin-Williams, 2005). However Harrison also discusses another historical story, which doesn't offer such positivity:

One other experience that is of significance... It was decided upon by a group of footballers that this person was gay. I don't know if the student was gay or not but it had offended them... and no matter what processes were put in place... the only resolution in the end was to move out of the school. It was one incident that I personally felt I let that child down. I let that family down. We lost that one. But it was so embedded, that the only way for that child to keep his state of mind and his health was to try to move away from it.

Again, this story was in Harrison's first couple of years as a year leader that is some ten to twelve years before this research was conducted. This is important, as Harrison is responsible for behaviour and welfare at his school, and has been for the past four years. He has, however, no other, more recent, anecdotes of homophobic prejudice to report.

## Discussion

PE and sport have traditionally been identified and understood as environments that socially privilege heterosexual masculine men (Pronger, 1990). Sports' ability to develop conservative and traditional masculine ideology, based upon being stoic, disciplined, competitive, misogynistic and homophobic, gave it social prominence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, PE teachers are often the frontline workforce who organised and delivered sport to the masses, especially those young people who are not necessarily motivated to participate in sport outside of the school environment. Through a closed-loop process, male PE teachers are often complicit in the hyper-masculine rituals of sport, which they reproduce and enforce in their PE lessons (Anderson, 2005; Clarke, 1998).

Despite this closed-loop process of sport, since the early 1990s, masculinities have undergone a radical transition to a softer and more inclusive gender performance for young sportsmen. Adolescent boys are offering emotional support to their friends (Zorn & Gregory, 2005), being physically tactile (Anderson & McCormack, 2014)

and engaging in a variety of clothing styles previously only afforded to women (Adams, 2011). Gay youth are largely not bullied for their sexuality; instead, they are embraced and included in social networks, something these PE teachers' accounts supported. These transformations have been possible as a product of homophobia's reduction in the western world (McCormack & Anderson, 2014). As such, men are decreasingly fearful of being considered homosexual, regardless of their actual sexual orientation and softer masculine behaviours no longer seem to impact heterosexual masculine identity (Anderson, 2014).

Our research contributes to the body of inclusive masculinities research, supporting the notions that teenage boys demonstrate caring behaviours, physical closeness and effeminate styles. Yet, whereas much of the work conducted previously has focused upon male students in post-compulsory education (McCormack, 2012), our work finds the behaviours of those a few years' younger are demonstrating similar attitudes.

The PE context, with its sporting foundations and being a space focused upon the body has often been considered a flash point for homophobic bullying and an environment unaccepting of non-heterosexual students (Clarke, 1998). The PE teachers in this preliminary study delivered narratives of peer acceptance, complete inclusion and normality (Savin-Williams 2005). Although some perceived it to be an un-safe space, none had (recent) stories of homophobia and only Harrison posed historical accounts of anti-gay harassment. This positivity is not attributed to the teaching staff, rather it is young people themselves who are becoming more inclusive of their gay peers. The teachers' constructions of masculinities are somewhat more complex, which we find is dependent on their cohort of socialization.

The PE teachers' understandings of masculinity are further evidence of a cohort variance in masculine values, which we also attribute to McCormack and Anderson's (2014) concept of homophobia. Those socialized into sport pre-1980, offer narratives of sexuality being a non-issue or something for which they haven't seen. Those in Generation X often value orthodox masculine values, portraying homosexuality and softer gender behaviours negatively. Finally the most recent cohort of PE teachers, present supportive discourses that are understanding of gay students' needs. This variance is explained by the era for which these men were

socialized into the sporting terrain, with those PE teachers who experienced their adolescence in the 1980s offering the most orthodox masculine ideologies.

Although this is only an initial study of 17 PE teachers, from six secondary schools in the south of England, it resonates with the wider research that is evidencing similar findings of inclusive masculinities. No longer can young men be inherently considered homophobic, and nor should PE be uncritically perceived as a space for which anti-gay bullying is prolific. The considerations of these PE teachers into how western youth culture has changed, shows a more positive situation for both concerns.

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